

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-11

NEW YORK TIMES
16 NOVEMBER 1982

STAT

HARD TO 'GET FIX' ON SOVIET LEADER

Bush and Shultz Are First Top
U.S. Officials to Hold Major
Talks With Andropov

By HEDRICK SMITH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 — The 30 minutes that Vice President Bush and Secretary of State George P. Shultz spent with Yuri V. Andropov marks the first time a top American official has had a serious talk with him despite Mr. Andropov's having been an important figure in the Soviet leadership for the last 15 years.

He had little contact with Westerners while he headed the K.G.B., the Soviet secret police and intelligence service. As a result, the portrait of the 68-year-old Soviet leader now offered to the public by Government and academic experts has been indirectly pieced together from Soviet defectors, private comments of Soviet officials, Finnish officials, some East Europeans and dissident Soviet artists.

Before today's meeting at the Kremlin, only a handful of senior American officials had even met Mr. Andropov face-to-face, among them Chief Justice Warren Burger and Malcolm Toon, the United States Ambassador to Moscow from 1976 to 1979.

Mr. Andropov was among a group of top Soviet officials who met with the Chief Justice during his trip to Moscow in the mid-1970's, but he made no strong impressions. Ambassador Toon later encountered Mr. Andropov at Kremlin receptions but acknowledged that he "did not have an opportunity to have a conversation with him so I was not able to get a fix on the man."

Facility With English Uncertain

Nor was Mr. Toon able to confirm reports in Moscow that Mr. Andropov has a penchant for American jazz, unorthodox tastes in art, a keen interest in Western society or a facility in English, let alone explore the contention of some Soviet officials that Mr. Andropov was a moderate in the Politburo on East-West relations.

"I frankly don't know whether the guy speaks English or not," Mr. Toon said on the ABC News program "This Week" on Sunday. "When I met him we spoke Russian. Whether he is a fluent English-speaker or not, I just don't know. I don't know what the evidence for that is. I understand that he likes modern art, that he's more sophisticated in that respect than Brezhnev was, but that is sort of confetti."

Over the years, the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency have kept an extensive dossier on Mr. Andropov, as well as on other top Soviet officials, from a variety of sources so that in the words of one official, "He remains a shadowy figure but not a total mystery."

In the early 1970's, for example, dissident Soviet artists talked to American diplomats and correspondents about Mr. Andropov's dropping in personally to their small unofficial exhibitions and even buying their work, a surprising twist given the campaigns the Communist Party and the K.G.B. had mounted against these artists at one time or another. Other Muscovites told Westerners of having visited his apartment in the same building where Leonid I. Brezhnev lived and having seen on Mr. Andropov's walls some unorthodox art that was described by one American diplomat as "boring to a Westerner but moderately daring for the Soviets."

STAT